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AUTHOR Vassar, William G.
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ABSTRACT

Described is Connecticut's comprehensive model for the education of the gifted and talented. Discussed are the following basic program components: state legislation and funding to provide reimbursement to local school districts for special programs or services, full-time consultative leadership in programming for the gifted and talented, and a coordinated professional development component encompassing preservice and inservice training as well as advanced graduate study. Also provided are an historical perspective of Connecticut programs for the gifted and a brief listing of informational resources. (LH)

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CONNECTICUT'S COMPREHENSIVE MODEL FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

BY

William G. Vassar
Consultant for Gifted and Talented
Connecticut State Department of Education
Box 2219
Hartford, Connecticut 06115

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(203) 566-3444

Division of Instruction, Francis A. McElaney, Associate Commissioner
Bureau of Pupil Personnel and Special Educational Services, Joe R. Gordon, Chief

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CONNECTICUT'S COMPREHENSIVE MODEL FOR THE EDUCATION

OF THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

John Hersey, the noted author, once wrote, "Our uncertainity about exactly how to develop talent is only one part of the greatest unsolved problems in American education - the problem of how to help every child realize his maximum potential." The nation as a whole, but the states individually, must recognize and assume the responsibility of the education of the gifted and talented as an integral part of their total educational spectrum.

Since each of the fifty states has its own constitution, considerable variations may be found in the state constitutions with respect to education. Some of the provisions are up-to-date and well conceived; others are antiquated and inadequate to the extent of impeding both general and special education programs.

Each state constitution, almost without exception, charges the state legislature with the responsibility, and almost unlimited authority, to establish and control public school programs.

Even after the various state legislatures have provided, within constitutional limits, for the general framework of their state educational systems, they continue to enact, amend and repeal many state laws relating to education during each legislative session.

The great majority of these laws are well conceived and accordingly beneficial to the educational school districts of the respective states. Unfortunately, though, there are many provisions pertaining to education which are poorly conceived, and thereby do not respond to meeting the needs of children and youth. More specifically, there are many state educational statutes which are not "in tune with the times."

In order for state educational statutes to promote and facilitate good

educational programming at the local level, they should be enacted and organized in conformity with sound principles of educational legislation. The following general principles should be followed in planning, studying, designing and implementing educational statutes:

(1) The laws should be in agreement with the provisions of the state constitution. Disregard for this principle frequently leads to litigation.

(2) Even though statutory laws should be more specific than constitutional provisions, they should be general enough to enable state and local boards of education to plan and operate without needless handicaps and restrictions.

(3) The statutes should be stated in unmistakably clear terms so as to convey the precise intent of the legislation.

(4) The laws should be codified periodically and systematically eliminating or amending provisions which are obsolete.

Recodification has not taken place as fast as it should; it should serve a significant purpose for state legislatures, state boards and state departments of education to analyze, appraise and update school codes. The cost of recodification is small when compared with the cost of litigation growing out of misunderstanding of antiquated, distorted and vaguely written provisions for the general and special education of a states' children and youth.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF CONNECTICUT PROGRAMS FOR THE GIFTED

John Hersey, the noted author, was chairman of a special study committee in 1956 to study the needs for Connecticut's gifted and talented children and youth. The Hersey Committee compiled a comprehensive report of the needs for programs in Connecticut for the gifted and talented. Little or no action was taken on the Roberts Report (the committee report) until 1965-66 when the State Department of Education conducted a nationwide

search for a consultant for the gifted and talented to provide leadership for the state and its 169 school districts in making provisions for such children and youth.

Concurrently, in recognition of a need for a review of the statutory provisions and regulations for the education of exceptional children in Connecticut, the State Board of Education arranged for a comprehensive study to be undertaken over a five month period in mid 1966. Dr. R. Daniel Chubbuck, Chairman of the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Bridgeport was named as the director and principal investigator of this study.

Dr. Chubbuck was charged with undertaking a comprehensive study of existing legislation related to the education of exceptional children (including the handicapped and the educationally gifted and talented) and preparing a report for submission to the State Board of Education no later than September 20, 1966. The report included:

(a) An analysis of procedures, policies and problems which existed in relation to this legislation and its contribution to the development of adequate educational programs and services for exceptional children.

(b) An analysis of other conditions which existed in the state which affected the efforts of local educational agencies to provide sound programs and services for all exceptional children.

(c) A synthesis of the concerns and recommendations of persons within the state interested in exceptional children, including educators, parents, and health, mental health and welfare workers.

(d) Recommendations concerning legislative policies and procedures to the State Board of Education designed to facilitate more adequate programs

and services for exceptional children in Connecticut.

Dr. Chubbuck incorporated all of the above-mentioned procedures into his study. Orientation, consultation, conference, study of documents, formulation of generalizations, re-examinations, writing, presentation, reevaluation and final crystalization were the steps utilized in the study.

Conferences were held with State Department personnel, Council for Exceptional Children staff at the national level, special education personnel from the local level, parents, school administrators, university staff and many other interested people.

The governor called various meetings involving individuals from institutions and organizations interested in exceptional children to "consult with" the director and "review suggestions for legislation."

The Connecticut Legislative Commission was involved for the purpose of sharing the emerging generalizations with them and gaining a view of how the report could be translated into a bill to be presented to the legislature at a later date.

The study did find a number of gaps and overlaps occuring in the existing legislation for exceptional children. Some was mandatory and others were left to local initiative. Some statutes delegated insufficient authority for enforcement of the mandate and for leadership and direction by the State Department of Education.

There existed a <u>severe</u> shortage of professional personnel competent to diagnose, direct, experiment, evaluate, and program for exceptional children. This observation indicated that institutions of higher learning had insufficient financial support by State and Federal Legislation to train such personnel.

Conflicts for control and lack of specific responsibility were serious shortcomings which existed as a consequence of gaps and overlaps in legislation and regulation. These conflicts and intervals occurred among state

and local agencies and within the educational establishment.

One of the most serious gaps uncovered in the study was the complete absence of legislation to provide for the education of gifted and talented pupils, those who are intellectually unchallenged by curriculum and strategy and those who have outstanding talents in the creative arts (music, visual and performing arts).

The study found the limitation of financial support to be a major block to adequate provisions for exceptional children. Furthermore, the study found that none of the needs were fully met; some were much more adequately served than others. It was found that the pattern of differences in classification for state funding complicated procedures for claiming state aid.

Inadequate and inequitable funding encouraged the employment of less than competent personnel, improper grouping, disproportionate pupil-teacher ratios and inadequate screening and selection processes and evaluative services.

The study was aimed at revision of statutes and concomitant regulatory action to preserve the good work which was being done while advancing the cause of equality of opportunity through provisions for individualized instruction.

The principle of equality of educational opportunities based on the intensive worth and unique nature of the human individual dictated that Special Education would be provided for all exceptionalities. The study interpreted exceptionalities to be encountered over the entire range of the school population and included those who suffered physical, mental and emotional handicaps, those who became bored because of their speed of perception, those who had special gifts for traditional disciplines and for creative arts and even those who had physical skills of notable extent.

This study pointed to an all encompassing piece of legislature for all exceptional children. The Chubbuck Report recommended that all exceptional

children be serviced under an umbrella type of state legislation. The challenge was a large one for the State Board and the legislature, but it was met in a cooperative and dedicated effort.

The State Board of Education approved the Chubbuck Report in the fall of 1966 and the Legislative Commission began work almost immediately to translate the generalizations of the study into a bill to be presented to the legislature in the next few months.

Members of the Legislative Commission and their professional staff members worked very closely with the professional personnel of the State Department of Education while they were doing the translation of the report into a bill for the legislature. Many informal meetings were held to hammer out a quality product to service the needs of all of Connecticut's exceptional children. The main objective of the bill was to include all exceptional pupils under an umbrella bill and allow excess cost reimbursement to each exceptionality. It was to become known as a "special education umbrella bill" which mandated school districts to provide programs and services to its mentally retarded, physically handicapped, socially and emotionally maladjusted, neurologically impaired and those suffering from an identifiable learning disability, and make it permissive for school districts to provide special education to pupils with extraordinary learning ability and/or outstanding talent in the creative arts. The bill which eventually was enacted into a statute, with a minimal number of changes as passed by the state legislature, was an outstanding effort and example of cooperation and communication among many groups including the state legislature and the state education agency which had to implement the statute in each of the state's 169 school districts.

The bill, as submitted and eventually passed, allowed the state education agency wide latitude in implementing the legislation at the local level. Few, if any definitions, appear in the statute. The flexibility allowed the State Agency to define various types of exceptional children. Specific wording

mandated the State Board to provide for the development and supervision of the educational programs for these pupils; it provided the State Board with the opportunity to regulate curriculum, conditions of instruction, physical facilities and equipment, class size, admission of pupils, and the requirements respecting necessary special services and instruction. However, the statute mandated that the State Board designate by administration regulations the procedures for identifying all categories of exceptional children. It also mandated that local school districts shall provide these programs for exceptional children and said that the State would reimburse two-thirds of the excess cost of the program and the various components of the programs eligible for reimbursement would include:

1. Professional Personnel - all personnel who are under contract to the local school district who spend more than one-third of their time with special programs and/or services to exceptional children. This category includes all types of supportive personnel (psychologists, counselors, etc.) including para-professional personnel and clerical assistance.
2. Equipment and Materials - the statute provides for reimbursement of such items that are directly related to the special education program.
3. Transportation - the districts are reimbursed for any transportation needed above and beyond that normally provided under the general transportation policy of the school district.
4. Special Consultative Services - this category covers the need for personnel who are not under contract to the school district. It allows the employment of non-certified personnel to assist in the identification of, the programming for, and the instruction of exceptional children (artists, musicians, dancers, planning consultants, etc.) Example. This allows a district to provide in-service training in all exceptionalities with the cost of such becoming a reimbursable item under the statute.

5. Rental of Facilities - the statute allows rental of space to provide instruction and or services to exceptional children. For example, portable classrooms, available space in the city or town which meet the various building codes for school buildings.

The Connecticut statute is predicated on programming rather than numbers of children. A number of states allow special funds based on a per child basis. This state statute allows the district to design a program for a group of exceptional children and youth and predicates the approval on the quality of the various components of the program rather than on a per pupil basis. The local school district submits a prior approval application for a program in the local school district and once the program is approved by the Bureau of Pupil Personnel and Special Educational Services, the district for two-thirds excess cost reimbursement of their program at the close of the fiscal year.

STATE LEGISLATIVE COMPONENT FOR THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

A. General Aspects

The legislative component in Connecticut is part of the total exceptionality statute. There are two basic differences in the gifted and talented component: (1) it is permissive and (2) it must be done "as part of the public school program."

This component represents an essential part of the State Agency's effort to extend, expand and improve programs and services to its children and youth with extraordinary learning ability and outstanding talent in the creative arts. Section 10-76 of the Connecticut General Statutes, Sections a-j is considered to be exemplary for the gifted and talented because of the broadened concept of definitions allowed the State Education Agency under administrative regulations approved by the State Assembly:

"Extraordinary learning ability" is deemed to be the power to learn possessed by the top five per cent of the students in a school district

as chosen by the special education planning and placement team on the basis of (1) performance on relevant standardized measuring instruments or (2) demonstrated or potential academic achievement or intellectual creativity.

"Outstanding talent in the creative arts" is deemed to be that talent possessed by the top five percent of the students in a school district who have been chosen by the special education planning and placement team on the basis of demonstrated or potential achievement in music, the visual arts or the performing arts.

The reader should note that a local school district could provide for upwards to ten percent of its school population, if the broadened concept of each definition is utilized. The definitions allow school districts to work with both demonstrated abilities and a potential to gain such abilities. The five percent factor is not an automatic or magic figure nor may it be used for one small segment of the definition. The statute does require that all identification criteria must be approved by the State. Identification becomes quite complex in the approval process to prevent loose or unreasonable criteria from being utilized. Another reason that the statute is exemplary, is the fact that it was the first state statute in the nation to specifically designate special programming for pupils with outstanding talents in the creative arts (music, visual arts, and the performing arts).

For example, a student may be identified who is not intellectually gifted, but possesses outstanding ability in sculpture, media, film making, dance, etc.

B. Funding to Local School Districts

State statutes, in many places, merely signify intent by inserting wording relative to the gifted and talented in either a general statute or one

relating to special education. Connecticut feels that the most consequential aspect of the statute, as far as the gifted and talented are concerned, is the provision for adequate funding to local school districts. A large number of well-intentioned school districts that formerly could not afford to make provisions for their gifted and talented now have a vehicle for implementing programs; and it is for this reason that we believe that state legislation with proper funding is a necessary component for effective state action in programming for the gifted and talented.

At the present time, a legislative position is being taken by the Department of Education to increase the reimbursement of programs to seventy-five percent and to make pre-payment to school districts rather than direct a reimbursement program. The State Advisory Committee on Special Education and the Department of Education are studying the necessary steps to change the statute from a permissive nature to one of mandation. Bills relative to such action are being submitted during the 1975 session of the State Assembly.

To summarize, the Department of Education presently reimburses school districts two-thirds of the excess cost of programs and/or services to the gifted and talented. This includes the cost of all professional and para-professional personnel, equipment and materials, transportation, special consultative services and rental of space. The program must be submitted for prior approval (see pp. 5-7, Policies, Procedures and Guidelines For Gifted and Talented Programs under Section 10-76 of the General Statutes. Connecticut State Department of Education. January 1975.) by the Bureau of Pupil Personnel and Special Educational Services.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The professional development component of the gifted and talented programs in Connecticut takes on two basic elements: One is the element of graduate

and undergraduate study and the other is the element of in-service education.

A. Graduate and Undergraduate Training Programs

Working in cooperation with the State Education Agency, the States' colleges and universities have responded to the needs of increasing numbers of professional personnel who are interested in taking course work or advanced degree programs to improve their skills to work with the gifted and talented of Connecticut. These course offerings range from the basic courses on the gifted and talented through specific courses on curriculum, differentiated teaching strategies and advanced seminar work.

The University of Connecticut's School of Education through the leadership of Dr. Joseph S. Renzulli has developed a complete advanced degree program (Masters, Sixth year, Doctorate) for professional personnel accepted for training prog[illegible] in the area of the gifted and talented. Southern Connecticut State College in New Haven has a relatively new undergraduate and graduate program for training professional personnel in this area of special education. This program is under the direction of Dr. Rudolph Pohl. St. Joseph College in West Hartford along with Central Connecticut State College and the University of Hartford offer course sequences in the education of the gifted and talented. Recently, Dr. Randolph Nelson of the University of Bridgeport has offered course work at the graduate level dealing with "Career Education for the Gifted and Talented." At various times, both Eastern and Western Connecticut State Colleges hold special summer workshops on the gifted and talented.

In the fall of 1966, only <u>one course</u> was being offered on the education of the gifted and talented in the institutions of higher learning in Connecticut. Eight years later, we have three graduate level training programs and five other colleges offering courses in this area of

special education.

B. Inservice Training

The second element of professional development is concerned with a comprehensive in-service training thrust to design and develop training processes for professional and para-professional personnel working with the gifted and talented at the school district level. The State Education Agency, through the Bureau of Pupil Personnel and Special Educational Services offers a wide variety of in-service professional development opportunities to the school districts.

The in-service components designed and developed by the Department of Education are sequentially developed to offer different levels of instruction to professional personnel in the field either by visual aides or printed materials.

The three dimensions of our in-service training programs include 1. Areas of the Gifted and Talented (the various types of gifted and talented children and youth a district may work with); 2. Level of Entry and Expectancy of Participants (Orientation, Design and Development of a Program, Implementation and Initiation, Leadership Training); 3. Content-Specific components and/or categories of information (Ex. Identification, Needs Assessment, Differentiated strategies and Curriculum, etc.)

The specific process of our in-service program is fully described in a publication entitled, "Models for Program Development in In-Service Education for the Gifted and Talented." Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Pupil Personnel and Special Educational Services 1974.

For example, utilizing both state and Federal funds (Title V, P.L. 91-230, EPDA, Title III Guidance, etc.) the Bureau has provided the following types of inservice training in the past eight years.

1. 475 Planning, Development and Update sessions in local school districts involving approximately 7,500 professional and lay personnel in the education of the gifted and talented.
2. 8 Annual Year End Institutes to update personnel from all over the State on the latest information available on educating the gifted and talented. These annual June conferences average between 300 - 350 personnel from on-going programs.
3. 16 Regional Orientation Workshops aimed at the orientation of general educators to make them more familiar with the special educational needs of the gifted and talented. These programs have involved over 4200 personnel.
4. 215 presentations to PTA's, parent groups, civic and lay organizations covering approximately 5100 people.
5. 5 Northeast Regional Conferences on the Gifted and Talented involving over 2500 participants.

These are just some of the inservice activities carried on by the State Department which are carefully articulated and coordinated with the professional development programs at the various institutions of higher learning.

FULL-TIME CONSULTATIVE SERVICES

The third major component needed by any of the fifty states in order to provide adequate programs and/or services to each state's group of gifted and talented children and youth.

Connecticut conducted a nationwide search for a full time director of programs for the gifted and talented in 1966. The State Education Agency has employed its full-time person since late 1966 to provide a wide variety of services and technical assistance to local school districts, professional groups, colleges and universities and other groups and organizations interested in

the education of the gifted and talented.

The role of a state director of gifted and talented programs is a multi-factored position. The person employed designs and develops a number of program strategies. A major portion of the consultants' time is spent in assisting school district personnel in designing, developing and implementing programs for the gifted and talented at their level. Another major activity is one of in-service training and working closely with colleges and universities to develop graduate level training programs. Further activities include development of publications and information to be disseminated to all groups interested in the gifted and talented; curriculum development, research, legislation, evaluation and developing models for new approaches to programs.

Consultants' Long Range Objectives

1. Objectives of the Program for the Gifted and Talented:

   A. Local Education Agencies will:

      1. Identify all gifted and talented pre-school and school aged children and youth in need of special education instruction and/or services.
      2. Initiate, expand or improve programs, i.e. differentiated instruction, curricula, services, etc. for the gifted and talented.
      3. Plan for and implement the evaluation of all special programs for the gifted and talented.
      4. Where appropriate and desirable, develop coordinated and cooperative regional efforts including facilities for the gifted and talented.
      5. Utilize information on successful programs, curricula, and services for the gifted and talented.

6. Design, develop, implement and/or participate in in-service training programs designed to provide or upgrade skills of personnel involved in or related to the education of the gifted and talented.

B. The State Education Agency will:

1. Provide full-time consultative services to LEA's, institutions of higher learning and other appropriate target groups to lend professional technical assistance to the designing and development of programs to meet the needs of the gifted and talented.
2. Provide supportive resource materials through regional centers to assist LEA's and other appropriate groups in giving better services to the gifted and talented.
3. Expand or improve existing special education legislation for the gifted and talented.
4. Identify and disseminate information on other state, Federal and private funding sources for gifted and talented programs.
5. Expand or improve existing guidelines to be used to implement LEA programs for the gifted and talented as part of a total state plan.

C. Colleges and Universities will:

1. Initiate new training programs or course sequences to train professional personnel in the education of the gifted and talented.
2. Adjust their current training programs commensurate with the demands for personnel at the LEA level.
3. Plan for and implement the evaluation of their professional development programs for the gifted and talented.

SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER (SERC)

The Bureau of Pupil Personnel and Special Educational Services operates and maintains a state-wide information resource center for all exceptional children and youth in Hartford, Connecticut. It is located in the Rennselaer Polytechnic Institute Graduate Center at 275 Windsor Street. This center maintains updated vertical files (15) and ERIC retrieval resources on the gifted and talented. Its library contains all current text books and materials on the gifted, talented and creative child.

The vertical files contain all types of information on programs, curriculum, identification, teaching strategies and materials from throughout Connecticut and the other states throughout the country. The Center serves as the focus of the state-wide delivery system in the state on gifted and talented children and youth.

PUBLICATIONS

A wide variance of materials are developed and disseminated by the state agency to the school districts and any other interested lay and professional personnel. Included are the following:

- The Gifted Child in Connecticut: A Survey of Programs, William G. Vassar and Joseph S. Renzulli, 1967. Connecticut State Department of Education (Out of Print) 55 pp.
- The Gifted Children in Connecticut: Practical Suggestions for Programming. William G. Vassar and Joseph S. Renzulli. 1969. Connecticut State Department of Education. (Out of Print). 84 pp. (This publication is being updated and amplified to 160 pp. and is due in publication by June 1975).
- 41 articles (mimeo) from bibliographies to specific strategies for school administrators.
- 3 slide presentations
  a. One State's Committment to Total Talent (80 slides), Connecticut's Story of the Gifted.
  b. Teaching Strategies for Teachers of the Gifted and Talented (40 slides)
  c. Talent Continums for a Broadening Concept of Giftedness (30 slides)

IMPORTANT! The above mentioned slide presentations are limited to in-state use with narrators or speakers supplied by the Department of Education.

VISITATION OF PROGRAMS

The Bureau maintains a publication entitled "Sample List of Programs and Resource People." This paper lists programs which can be visited along with the names and telephone numbers of contact people and a brief description of each such program. Although it is not a complete listing, it will give the reader an opportunity to get an idea of what types of programs are maintained in Connecticut.

SUMMARY

The excitement of the State of Connecticuts' programs lie not in numbers, but in the variety of new and different approaches that have been opened to the gifted and talented children and youth in the state. Our programs taken step by step, to increase the quantity and quality of programs for the gifted is directly related to three basic elements that each state should have if they are going to design and develop a program:

1. A sound legal and properly funded statute to provide reimbursement to local school districts when they provide special programs and/or services for the gifted and talented.
2. Provision of full-time consultative leadership by the State Education Agency to assist local school districts in programming for the gifted and talented.
3. A coordinated and articulated program for teacher training and retraining in the area of the gifted and talented ranging from preservice to in-service and advanced graduate study.

The successful coordination and articulation of these elements presents a major challenge to all concerned if a total program is going to be implemented at the state level. The goals set by a State can be accomplished through careful planning and a continuous effort on the part of legislators, professional educators and the lay public.

Connecticut has taken a major step forward toward a countdown to excellence for its gifted and talented children and youth in the past eight years. However, we have only scratched the surface of human resources residing in Connecticut public schools. We have only scratched the surface in meeting the needs of the many kinds of giftedness and talent in our schools. Only time, committment and energy coupled with our present and future tools of implementation will tell the story of total talent retrieval in Connecticut in years to come.

WGV/pjd